?The Lottery? Essay, Research Paper

The Lottery and Religion

The Lottery, and Christianity Shirley Jackson’s short story “The Lottery”, if left at face value, is a perverse tale of a small village sacrificial ceremony, which leaves a lasting impression upon the reader. However to take the story at face value would nearly be an exercise in futility, for then the reader would be missing the deeper meanings found in the delicate symbolism that Jackson places throughout the tale.

Indeed, the symbolic meanings of many of the people and things placed throughout the narrative depict certain attitudes and beliefs about Christianity and its religious system. Take for instance the Black box that is used in “The Lottery“. It is used as a representation of the Bible, because many Christian people base judgments of others on things that they take from the Bible and the village inhabitants pass judgment on Mrs. Hutchison based on what is literally taken from the box. The box is black, and the Bible in its most common form is black. Black is also a representative color of mystery, and the Bible has been a great mystery to man for ages. Just as the Bible has changed grudgingly throughout the passage of time, retaining pieces of its former self, the black box has been altered as well, rebuilt using remnants of its predecessors. Even though the box has been altered, it is still used in the lottery, just as the bible is used in churches after its many alterations. This showing that even though it is not the same religion as it once was Christians still remain adamant about its infallibility.

The box, being a symbol of the Bible, rests upon a stool with three legs. This “three legged stool” is a representation of God, the legs being the three forms, which God takes; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, the Christian concept known as the trinity. Just as the Bible is held up and and given credibility by the belief of a God, the box is held up by the stool. Nearly the two become one, the stool and the box, just as in Christian beliefs God and the bible are all but inseparable, much to the chagrin of others. Slips of paper, as insignificant as they may seem on the surface, take on meaning of great magnitude in the story. As each individual participant in the lottery finds that there paper is not the one marked, the paper is released and drifts away. The slips of paper come to represent the participant’s souls, here representing the untainted soul, drifting away and remaining free, as if going to heaven. In contrast Mrs. Hutchison’s slip of paper that has a dark spot, shows that marred souls receive punishment after judgment, a common Christian belief.

I believe the symbolism here is trying to show us that only certain people can be lucky enough to fit within the criteria that Christianity places on a person in order to be holy, and that a sinner can easily be anyone if you use Christian standards.

Several of the characters and attributes of the characters come to embody Christian, Biblical, and church-like things. For example you have Mr. summers who is the head of the procession. He is wearing a “clean white shirt….” this giving us the feeling of him being a priest, whom often times wear white robes. Mr. Adams is the first to draw from the box and receive his judgment. In the Bible, as many already know, Adam is the first man, and is also the first to receive judgment from god. Old man Warner denotes many things within the story. He becomes a symbolic of the stereotype for those who have attended church the longest, and are the strongest believers in their church. He is adamant in his belief that the lottery is right and all those who believe differently are sure to be punished, and Christians believe that if you don’t have and attend church you are damned. Through the use of Mr. Warner the story strikes the reader with the realization of how foolish those people who simply follow blindly are, trying to point out that Christians are much the same way. Mrs. Hutchison comes to symbolize those who have tainted souls. Mrs. Hutchison is late for the lottery, and she doesn’t remain faithful to her belief that the lottery is right when she is the one faced with death, this showing that she lacks faith, a true wrong in the eyes of a Christian.

“The Lottery”, with this symbolism, is showing what a barbaric and ignorant belief Christians hold that only people faithful to Christianity are good, and that all others should be punished. With the use of all this symbolism, the story becomes a graphic depiction of the way tradition affects Christianity, and shows some of its more negative aspects. It shows us that American society has become accustomed to the ideas of Christianity, and is so convinced that it is the right way of thinking, that we do not even explore the idea that it may be wrong, or unnatural. The story shows how Christianity can often times be barbaric, as with the Holy crusades, and the Salem witch trials, to name only a couple. It shows us the hypocrisy that resides within the churches, for often times people are judged for things that only fate decides. Just as in the way that the Christian belief is that all homosexuals will be punished in the after life, while many homosexuals argue that they do not choose to be gay but that fate made them that way. In the end “The Lottery” is a criticism of how many in Western civilization have come to practice traditions and not a religion.